

Speaking as a concerned member of the Governor's Water Policy Council and Rural Groundwater Committee (RGC), it is disappointing to learn that representatives from Arizona Farm Bureau and our State Legislature are abandoning the Rural Groundwater Committee. The Committee is challenged with the ultimate task to develop an alternative water "management" solution, other than AMAs and INAs, to help sustain groundwater supplies in rural areas of Arizona.

The farm and ranch families represented by the Arizona Farm Bureau will no doubt feel the effects of unregulated groundwater pumping by significant out-of-state industrial and corporate agricultural interests that threaten the future of rural water supplies for all of Arizona's families. A blanket protection of current uses may end up depleting Arizona's aquifers while depriving rural families of access to local water resources.

The Committee recognizes that individual basins have unique situations that require local solutions. The fact is there are rural groundwater basins in our State where most groundwater use is not managed or monitored in any way. In some areas, unlimited groundwater pumping is an unconscionable "free for all" resulting in severe declines, serious and expensive consequences to the watershed, and individual exempt/family wells being dried up.

Without question, Ms. Smallhouse is correct that the RGC is an opportunity to move beyond the contentious debates of the past and produce the innovative solutions multiple stakeholders can embrace for safeguarding our rural groundwater resources. But to make progress that will ensure the economic vitality of rural communities including groundwater for the future, you must show up and represent to make it happen.

Protecting Arizona's groundwater and representing all rural families takes stepping up, putting forth genuine effort to meet the challenge, developing a solution and sticking with it. Ms. Smallhouse and Senator Kerr have chosen not to remain involved in the Council's efforts tasked by Governor Hobbs. Senator Kerr, as Chair of the Senate Natural Resources, Energy and Water Committee, has a responsibility to hear the concerns of all our rural stakeholders, many of whom are represented on the Council.

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